

残酷的谋杀



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## **A COOL KILLING**

**Stephen Murray was born in London in 1954 and educated at Whitgift School and Downing College, Cambridge. Married to a doctor, he worked for many years as a Chartered Surveyor before turning to writing full time. He lives on the edge of the Ashdown Forest in Sussex.**

*by the same author*

**Salty Waters**

## Chapter One

'Would you see if you can raise Dr Swainson for me?'

'I'll try, Doctor, but when we bleeped him earlier we couldn't get any reply.'

Dr Angela Norman, tall, elegant, composed, waited calmly by the switchboard while the operator called her husband on the electronic paging device.

'There's still no reply. Do you want me to ring round?'

'Just try the lab, if you would, Mary. If he's not there it'll have to wait, I've a clinic in a moment.'

The girl rang a number on the internal phone.

'I'm sorry, Doctor. He was in earlier - I got an outside line for him.'

'All right, Mary. I expect I'll see him later. It'll wait till then.'

Smiling her thanks, Angela Norman turned away, crossing the echoing floor of the reception area with unhurried step, hands in the pockets of her white coat which flapped open to display a well tailored wool skirt and silk blouse. At her throat a single line of cultured pearls completed an ensemble which was as much a uniform and badge of rank as the blue dresses and coloured shoulder flashes of the nurses who passed to and fro.

Ovenden was an old hospital, a collection of buildings linked in no discernible order by a bewildering network of covered ways and lobbies. Somewhere at the centre was the original Edwardian cottage hospital, hidden among the accretions of the 'thirties and 'fifties, buildings now under-used as their functions had been taken over

by the new district general hospital twelve miles away. The blood donor unit occupied a converted surgical ward, another had been adapted to form an old people's day centre. One or two remained totally empty, visited only by those who had lost their way, probationers on their first day and patients' relatives confused by the illogicality of the site. Gradually the hospital was regressing to its Edwardian origins, serving a local population who came for a short stay to have their babies in the small maternity unit, to various outpatient clinics, or for a longer, final stay in the geriatric ward.

With the unconcern of long habit, Dr Norman wended her way through the labyrinth of corridors, out into courtyards, through covered ways, past the maternity unit to a single-storey block of creamwashed brick, with a sign beside the door which said LADY ANSON MEMORIAL BUILDING. Beneath, the ubiquitous blue signboard of the health authority said, in stark and unconscious irony, *Family Planning and Venereology*. Dr Norman pushed open the door and went in.

'Do you think it's cold enough for crumpets?'

'Definitely. Crumpets would be perfect. Also Madeira cake and Darjeeling.'

'It's not the same, though, having them in summer. And without a fire. You don't think we ought to have scones instead?'

'Not at all. Crumpets will be fine. Don't worry about it.'

'But I want to get it right.'

Alec gave her a little hug. 'You will. You always do.'

'I wish I could get used to your friends, all the same. I try too hard to get things right, then I invariably make a mess of it and feel I'm letting you down, and all the time



I'm not coming over as me, if you know what I mean. I wish you hadn't seemed so inoffensive when we met.'

'That was my method. Not bad, eh? It usually works.'

'Maybe, but I don't particularly like to be on the receiving end of it. I suppose it's what makes you so good at your job.'

'Ah. Perhaps you'd like to come along and tell the Superintendent that. He inclines to the view that first impressions are generally correct and has been known to refer to me as the wettest thing in the force outside the underwater branch.'

'Oh, Alec. Surely not.'

'Actually, yes. In an audible aside to one of the Woman Police Sergeants he happened to have his eye on at the time. Should we make ourselves presentable, do you think?'

Diana sat up and refastened the buttons of her blouse. Alec watched her with a lazy, humorous turn to his mouth which she had grown to recognize as a sign of contentment. It was barely two months since Diana had accepted the invitation to move into Alec's flat, and looking back, she marvelled that she had had the perceptiveness to agree. She might so easily have been deceived by the outward camouflage and missed the delight of exploring the subtle and intelligent person within. At first it had been a series of jolts when she found that Alec was a policeman, already, in his early thirties, an inspector in the detective branch; that he held a decoration - this she learned from a friend, for Alec never mentioned it - from his time in the Army on a short service commission; that he relaxed to the sound of Gregorian chants; and that his circle of friends included the sons and daughters of people she was used to reading of in the papers, and who held Alec in genuine, if wary, respect. Later, Alec took her to the Hall and she met his parents. By then she was less



easily surprised and it seemed somehow only consistent that his father should be a retired general and High Sheriff of the county.

From wondering what she was doing spending her time with an upper class twit she had passed swiftly to wondering what on earth he was doing spending his time on her. In this she did herself less than justice, for Diana herself was both clever and well-regarded and her parents, academics, were themselves eminent if not blue-blooded. Alec had watched with some amusement the evolution of her attitude towards him, and thought them to be a far more likely couple than Diana could yet see. For all his outward diffidence on casual acquaintance, Alec had a high opinion of his own judgement and it gratified him to watch Diana pass through the stages of conversion from sceptic to disciple. He valued her highly, however, as he valued the content she had brought him amid the harsh demands of his career.

Later, as they sat with their guests, college friends of Alec's, buttering crumpets and chatting inconsequentially, Alec acknowledged his good fortune. The fruits of a successful career – financial reward, a well-known name, maybe a knighthood – were still distant and uncertain, yet here and now there was little he desired which he had not got. The flat, with the elegance and proportion of the country house of which it had been a part, the outlook over gardens – no less pleasant for being shared – and countryside, his friends, Diana, even the fact that there were still goals to strive for added to his feeling of conscious content.

It was shattered by the telephone bell. Diana glanced at Alec, who shook his head, but when she answered the ringing it was for him, and despite his impassive expression as he listened to the call she knew it was work.

'Yes,' he said finally. 'I'll do that. Half an hour. Right.'

'Work?'

"Fraid so. Sorry to break up the party, but I'll have to go."

'But you're not even on duty today,' Diana protested.

'Mm. All the same. Sorry.'

'Will you be long?'

'Can't say. You know how it is. Some chap's gone missing at the hospital; probably nothing to it, but being Sunday only Henry was in and he's gone home with 'flu. You stay,' he added to the others. 'Don't waste the rest of the crumpets. If someone chooses to go wandering off there's not much we can do, after all.'

At the police station, just off the sleeping Sunday high street, Alec found a detective-constable writing up his notes at a counter where an avuncular desk sergeant was intent on the Sunday paper.

'Sorry to trouble you, Mr Stainton. Inspector Griffiths thought he'd better take his 'flu home with him, then of course as soon as he'd gone we got this call from the hospital.'

'Right-ho, Jim. 'Afternoon, Andy. Shall we go into my office and you can tell me what's what.'

The young constable, still looking over his notes, followed Alec through into an inner room and took the offered chair. Alec sat on the side of the desk to reduce the formality of the situation.

'Well, sir, it's like this.' The detective-constable, who was probably no more than four or five years younger than Alec himself, looked innocently youthful in jeans and T-shirt. His translation from the uniformed branch was painfully recent and he was anxious to get everything right.

'All we got to start with was a call from Ovenden Hospital to say one of their consultants couldn't be traced, he was supposed to be in the hospital yesterday and

nobody'd seen him, then he never went home either yesterday evening. Then he should have been back at the hospital this afternoon for a case conference or something and didn't show up, so by this time they were getting anxious and thought they should mention it to us.'

'Who was it who rang?'

'Hospital secretary – a woman called Miss Carmel. She wasn't quite sure what to do, but thought we ought to know.'

'Not very promising. You can't lose a consultant, after all. If he's missing, presumably it's by choice and there's not much we can do about it. Nothing from traffic?'

'No, sir, that was the first thing I checked. But his car was at home, anyway; he lives close enough to walk to the hospital, so that seemed to be out.'

'And you went down there?'

'Yes. Really, just so that they could see we weren't bored by it all.'

'Good. Who did you see?'

'Well, the secretary, of course, the one who rang us. One of the junior doctors who normally works with Dr Swainson – that's the chap that's missing. Then I went along to see Swainson's wife. She works at the hospital too, but she's kept her maiden name, Dr Norman.'

Alec nodded patiently. 'How was she taking his absence?'

'Well, much as you'd expect. I mean, anxious, puzzled, kept telling me she couldn't imagine where he'd got to. Not actually very worried, perhaps – yet. Last saw him on Saturday morning and so far as she was aware he was on his way to the hospital. Tried to reach him later in the morning but without success and says she didn't try very hard because it wasn't that important.'

Alec pondered, kicking at the leg of the desk. 'Pick up any undercurrents?'

The young detective-constable thought for a moment. 'Not really, sir. I mean, there didn't seem to have been any rows, the wife's anxiety seemed straightforward enough. She must realize it's quite likely he's just gone off for a weekend with a bird. So far as anyone was concerned he had just gone astray and it had finally got inconvenient enough for them to get on to us.'

'What do you think we should do?'

'Me, sir?' the constable looked startled at the question.

'Yes. What would you do if you were in my shoes?'

'I don't think there's much we can do, sir, is there, except make a note of it and wait for him to turn up?'

Alec smiled. 'Quite so. So let's do that. Perhaps tomorrow you and I can have another little trip out to Ovenden and see if anything else has come to light. Do you like crumpets?'

'Crumpet, sir? Why, yes, I -'

'Crumpets. Plural. With butter and jam. I think it's time I went to see if there are any left. Goodbye.'

And that, thought Alec as he drove home, was a waste of time. But he was wrong. In the morning when he climbed the steps and pushed open the swing doors of the police station it was to find the place in a state of near-panic. He stood bemused a moment while people scurried to and fro with worried expressions like anxious chickens, then the desk sergeant from the day before emerged from an inner room and caught his eye.

'Thank heaven.'

'What is all this?'

'It's that consultant that went missing up at the hospital. They've found him.'

'Fine. Why all the fuss? Where did they find him?'

'In the fridge.'

'What?'



'In the refrigerator,' the sergeant repeated grimly. 'In the hospital mortuary of all places.'

'Dead?'

'He's dead all right. I should think he's probably frozen solid.'

Well,' Alec said soberly, 'it's a remarkably thoughtful place to die, wouldn't you agree?'

## Chapter Two

Alec stared at the clock on the wall and tried to concentrate on the Superintendent's voice. The clock said twenty-five past ten. Very nearly two hours since the discovery of the body of Dr Swainson in the mortuary refrigerator at Ovenden Hospital, an hour and a half since Alec had entered the police station. In that hour and a half there had been no lack of activity, but little of it seemed to have been to much purpose. Any moment now the hospital would ring back asking why no one had been sent round, and all the time whatever might be learned at the scene was growing more elusive as new events blurred recollection, changes in the weather effaced physical clues, rumour mingled imperceptibly with truth. Alec had little doubt that they had a murder on their hands. The other possibilities – someone stumbling on the body of Dr Swainson dead from a heart attack and conscientiously placing it in the mortuary drawer, subsequently being too upset or absent-minded to tell anyone, for example – seemed highly improbable. And then, in a hospital, where people had such a matter of fact relationship with death . . .

. . . and so in the circumstances – 'he dragged himself back to the pompous voice of the Superintendent – 'you'd better make a start and I'll take over the reins as soon as I can arrange it. You'll report to me, of course, at every stage. I shall expect to be kept fully in the picture. I'll speak to the ACC directly. He'll appreciate that this is only a temporary measure. Now, have you got all that?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Good. Well, you'd better get down there, lad. You mustn't hang around where a homicide is concerned. It's been too long already.'

'Yes, sir. Quite so.'

'I'll try and look in later in the day, if my meeting at the Home Office finishes in time.' Alec looked at the clock again. The minute hand gave a little click and moved on another division. 'Is that quite clear?'

'Yes, sir, quite. Thank you.' Alec put the phone down with relief and sat for a moment marshalling his thoughts, before rising briskly. The phone started to ring again as he left the room. He ignored it.

Out in the front office some of the commotion had died down, but there was a air of anticipation that reminded Alec of examination day at school. Heads turned to him as he came through.

'Hospital on the phone again, Mr Stainton,' the desk sergeant said. 'I put it through.'

'Tell them we're on our way. And Jim, is Andy Johnson in? I'm going down there and I'd like him with me.'

'He's in the canteen, sir,' one of the WPCs volunteered.

Alec turned to her. 'Would you fetch him out for me? Tell him to get a move on. He can have another cup of coffee later. And Jim - ' he turned back to the sergeant. 'I don't suppose anyone's put the scene of crime team on to this yet? Get on to them and have them meet me down there. Doctor, too. Ah, Andy. Set? Let's get moving, then.'

Ovenden Hospital was set on the edge of the town, its grounds merging pleasantly with adjacent fields and insulating it from the housing estates. Detective-Constable Johnson preserved a diffident silence during the short journey out, being indeed rather in awe of this elegant and youthful inspector who, whether his reputation was

as a dilettante or as a brilliant whizz-kid, undoubtedly stood out from the normal run. Opinion in the station inclined to the whizz-kid view, not least since it conferred a reflected glory on them all, and Alec himself did nothing to discredit the opinion. Johnson was very conscious that today both of them were new boys – his first murder inquiry, Alec's first in charge – and was anxious that neither of them should blunder. Certainly the Inspector seemed cool enough, but still, a murder . . .

'I think we'll take a low key approach,' Alec broke the silence. 'No sense in getting carried away with our own importance, so we'll let other people do the talking and the running around so far as we can, and we'll just act as blotting-paper and soak it all up. Would you mind very much taking notes?' Andy, to whom the taking of notes was an everyday fact of life, said no, he wouldn't mind.

Turning in between brick pillars, they followed the direction signs through a warren of roadways to what seemed to be the main entrance, and parked in a 'doctors only' slot. At the the reception desk, the girl barely raised her head at the two young men, one slight and well dressed, the other heavier and in the inevitable jeans and denim jacket, bending her head again to write in a register. Eventually she straightened up and looked at them in polite enquiry.

'Detective-Inspector Stainton,' said Alec quietly. 'And Detective-Constable Johnson.'

The change in the receptionist's manner was comical. She looked beyond them in what Alec recognized as the instinctive search for someone older and more senior which so often greeted him when he introduced himself. Johnson shifted uncomfortably, and Alec hoped he would keep his head. Standing on one's dignity was usually a mistake, he found, and he didn't want it to get in their way today of all times. He contrived to look competent



and unruffled as the girl lifted a receiver and pressed the buttons for a number, her eyes still assessing the two men.

'She'll be with you in a minute,' the receptionist said, putting the phone down. 'You can take a seat if you like.'

'Thank you.'

While they waited for the hospital secretary, Alec established the routine of the reception desk and switchboard. During the day they were manned by Mary, who was on duty now, or another girl, Maureen, while at night calls were taken by the porters. Not much went on at night at Ovenden Hospital, it seemed, and calls and visitors were few. Telephone calls in were not logged, merely put through to the relevant extension, while all outside calls had to come through the switchboard. It was hardly the most modern of systems, Alec thought, and must be diabolically frustrating and a great waste of time. It was, however, a good way of keeping tabs on people using the hospital phone for private calls. Alec was on the point of asking about the weekend when there was a clack of heels on the tiled floor and he turned to greet the hospital secretary.

Josephine Carmel was a compact, highly groomed woman in her mid-thirties, with a reserved but not unfriendly manner. Alec noted with some surprise the absence of wedding and engagement rings, for Miss Carmel's attractive figure and finely sculpted cheekbones would bring her as much admiration as most women could wish for, surely. For an administrator whose patch had been invaded by unexplained death she seemed remarkably self-possessed, but there were signs of strain in the fine lines at the eyes and mouth, while something about her make-up suggested that she might have been crying not too long ago.

'Inspector Stainton?' she looked from one to the other